

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 2613

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, CE
SUBJ: REPORTS OF POSSIBLE COMMUNAL DISTURBANCES IN MUTUR AND
GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA (GSL) MEASURES DIRECTED AT THE
TAMIL LIBERATION TIGER MOVEMENT

REF: COLOMBO 2467

1. A FOREIGN SERVICE LOCAL (FSL) EMPLOYEE WHO HAS MADE SEVERAL
RECENT TRIPS TO THE NORTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCES REPORTS
THERE HAVE BEEN APPROXIMATELY TWENTY DEATHS IN THE AREA OF
MUTUR ON THE EASTERN COAST WITHIN THE LAST THREE WEEKS. THESE
DEATHS ARE A RESULT OF CONFLICTS BETWEEN TAMIL FISHERMEN
RESIDENT IN THE MUTUR AREA AND SINGHALESE FISHERMAN WHO HAVE
MOVED THEIR FISHING OPERATIONS TO THE EAST COAST DUE TO POOR
WEATHER ON THE WEST COAST CAUSED BY THE SEASONAL MONSOON.
CONSIDERING SRI LANKA'S EXTREMELY HIGH MURDER RATE, TWENTY
DEATHS IN THE MUTUR AREA IS NOT UNLIKELY, ESPECIALLY DURING
THE TIME OF THE SEASONAL MIGRATION OF SINGHALESE FISHERMAN
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INTO AN AREA WHICH THE TAMIL FISHERMEN LAY CLAIM TO; HOWEVER
THE FSL STATES THAT IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THESE MURDERS HAVE
BEEN A RESULT OF COMMUNAL PROBLEMS IN THE AREA. A SEPARATE
EMBASSY SOURCE HAS CONFIRMED THE DEATHS OF TWENTY TO TWENTY-
FIVE PERSONS IN THE MTUR AREA IN THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS BUT
FROM HIS INFORMATION WE ARE NOT ABLE TO MAKE A DETERMINATION
AS TO WHETHER THE VIOLENCE IS MOTIVATED BY COMMUNAL PROBLEMS.

NO REPORTS ON THE VILENCE IN THE MUTUR AREA HAVE APPEARED IN THE TAMIL, SINGHALESE, OR ENGLISH LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS; PROBABLY AS A RESULT OF GSL CENSORSHIP OF NEWS WHICH IT BELIEVES MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO THE POSSIBILITY OF INCREASED COMMUNAL VIOLENCE.

2. THE FSL STATES THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF SMALL INCIDENTS RESULTING FROM THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF LARGE NUMBERS OF POLICE AND MILITARY UNITS IN THE NORTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCES, WHICH CONTINUE TO ADD TO THE TENSE SITUATION RESULTING FROM THE GSL'S AGGRESSIVE ACTION IN SEARCHING OUT MEMBERS OF THE LIBERATION TIGER GROUP. THE FSL REPORTS THAT SOME TAMIL OWNERS OF SMALL SHOPS IN THE JAFFNA AREA ARE RESPONDING TO THE ARROGANCE OF SOME OF THE SINGHALESE TROOPS WHO ARE ON TEMPORARY DUTY IN THE AREA BY USING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER AS AN EXCUSE TO REFUSE SERVICE TO THE SINGHALESE TROOPS AND POLICE UNTIL THEY ARE FORCED TO OBTAIN THE ASSISTANCE OF A TAMIL SPEAKING SOLDIER OR POLICEMAN TO TRANSLATE THEIR ORDER TO THE SHOP KEEPER. THE FSL STATES THAT WHAT LITTLE ANTI-LIBERATION TIGER MOVEMENT SENTIMENT REMAINS IN THESE PROVINCES IS NOT DIRECTED AGAINST THE ACTIONS OF THE LIBERATION TIGER MOVEMENT BUT IS MOTIVATED BY THE FEAR OF GSL RETALIATION AGAINST ALL TAMILS RESIDENT IN THE TROUBLED PROVINCES. HE ALSO STATES IT NOW APPEARS THAT A LARGE MAJORITY OF TAMILS RESIDENT IN THE NORTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCES ARE EITHER INDIFFERENT TO THE LIBERATION TIGER MOVEMENT OR ARE IN FAVOR OF THEIR ACTIONS
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AND GOALS.

3. THE FSL OPINED THAT SOME OF THE YOUNG TAMILS IN THE NORTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCES ARE CHEERED BY THE STANDARDIZATION OF THE UNIVERSITIES AND VIEW THIS AS A POSITIVE STEP THE GSL HAS TAKEN TO REDRESS TAMIL GRIEVANCES. HE ALSO STATED THAT, SINCE MILITARY AND POLICEMEN ON TEMPORARY DUTY IN THESE PROVINCES NOW RECEIVE A SPECIAL ALLOWANCE, SOME OF THESE TROOPS TEND TO BE MORE MODERATE IN THEIR DEALINGS WITH THE TAMILS THAN IN THE PAST. HOWEVER, THE HOSTILITY OF MANY OF THE TROOPS WHO STILL RESENT THEIR ASSIGNMENT TO THESE AREAS AND THE FRUSTRATIONS OF THE MAJORITY OF TAMIL RESIDENTS CONTINUE TO MAKE THE COMMUNAL SITUATION TENSE.
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